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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [AS](#)

SUBJECT: AUSMIN 2008: JOINT COMMUNIQUE AND MEDIA EVENTS

REF: A. CANBERRA 178

[1](#)B. CANBERRA 179

[1](#)C. CANBERRA 180

CANBERRA 00000186 001.2 OF 007

AUSMIN 2008 JOINT COMMUNIQUE

[1](#)1. (U) The Joint Communique issued at the conclusion of the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) in Canberra on February 23 reflected a reaffirmation of the strength of the U.S.-Australian alliance, and a reiteration by both countries of their commitment to work together to confront common challenges, and to contribute to stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Specifically, both countries committed to work toward a stable, united and democratic Iraq, as well as the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan. They stressed the importance of developing a comprehensive strategy to more effectively integrate security, reconstruction and development activities in Afghanistan, and called on the international community -- in particular, NATO countries -- to enhance contributions to Afghanistan. The statement endorsed long-term engagement with Pakistan; expressed support for efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East, particularly in talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority; and registered concern over the impasse in Lebanon. On regional security, the communique reflected the bilateral agreement to build capacity in Southeast Asia in such areas as counterterrorism and maritime security, as well as a desire for intensified cooperation with Indonesia and the Philippines. It welcomed the return of democracy to Thailand but expressed concern over the lack of progress toward reform in Burma. Australia and the U.S. welcomed China's global and regional engagement, while encouraging it to be more transparent about its military modernization. They reiterated that a declaration of the DPRK's nuclear programs is essential toward the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and urged the DPRK

to make a complete declaration as soon as possible. Both side reaffirmed their commitment to nonproliferation, including access to man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) by terrorists and other non-state actors. The communique expressed deep concern over Iran's nuclear activities and calls upon Iran to comply fully with the IAEA and its international obligations to be fully transparent regarding its past and present nuclear activities. On defense relations, the communique commends the progress on concluding implementing arrangements for the Treaty on Defense Trade Cooperation signed in September 2007, and welcomes the forthcoming Exercise Talisman Sabre 2009. It announced an agreement to establish a joint investment program to develop a combined humanitarian assistance/disaster relief capability, as well as an agreement to pursue options for Qcapability, as well as an agreement to pursue options for enhancing collaboration in Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance. Australian and the United States agreed to finalize negotiations on a Memorandum of Understanding that would continue the Joint Combined Training Capability. The communique noted the two countries had signed a Statement of Principles establishing a military satellite communications partnership during the AUSMIN consultations, and agreed on principles for enhancing aspects of the intelligence relationship. (Full text of the communique follows at para 10, below.)

AUSMIN PRESS CONFERENCE

12. (U) In the AUSMIN meeting's concluding press conference, the four foreign affairs and defense principals issued brief statements before taking questions. The parties reaffirmed that the bonds between Australia and the U.S. were as strong as they ever had been. Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said the Alliance transcended any change of governments, reiterating the relationship was just "business

CANBERRA 00000186 002.2 OF 007

as usual." Smith said the parties had discussed Iraq, including the withdrawal of Australia's combat troops, stressing that the issue "was behind us." He noted other topics discussed included Australia's enduring commitment to Afghanistan; possible Australian non-military contributions to Iraq; and capacity building in both countries. He stated that the U.S. and Australia hoped democracy would take hold in Pakistan and that it would strengthen its efforts to combat terrorism. The Foreign Minister said that the parties had talked about the Australian Government's commitment to Asia and the importance of continued U.S. engagement in the region.

13. (U) The Defense Secretary expressed U.S. appreciation for Australia's leadership in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and East Timor, and acknowledged Australia's strong support in the fight against terrorism. The U.S. had no better partner and ally than Australia, he added. Deputy Secretary Negroponte said the parties had discussed Burma,

SIPDIS

the Six-Party Talks, how to deepen engagement with Indonesia, cooperation in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the need to strengthen the rule of law in both countries, and implementation of the Defense Trade Cooperation Treaty signed by the President and former Prime Minister John Howard in September.

14. (U) In response to a question on whether Australia's growing trade with China would adversely affect its relationship with the United States, Foreign Minister Smith noted that the U.S. had more trade with China than Australia. When the Chinese Foreign Minister visited Australia recently, Smith said, he had told him that China needed to be more transparent and open about its military modernization.

15. (SBU) Defence Minister Fitzgibbon responded to a question on the new Australian government's posture on Missile Defense

by congratulating the United States on the successful destruction of the crippled spy satellite, but otherwise avoided a direct response, evidence of the new Labor government's inconsistent approach to missile defense. To a question on whether the United States would sell F-22s to Australia, Secretary Gates said U.S. law precluded any foreign sales of the aircraft. Minister Fitzgibbon said the GOA intended to review all options, including the F-22, as part of its force review, refusing to be drawn to a reporter's suggestion that the F-22 was needed to fight China or any other country in the region.

¶6. (U) When asked if the Howard Government's election defeat reflected a repudiation of its closeness to the United States, Smith replied that the previous government's defeat was due to its failure to effect generational change.

OTHER MEDIA EVENTS

¶7. (U) Press Cocktail Event: Secretary Gates, Ambassador Q7. (U) Press Cocktail Event: Secretary Gates, Ambassador Negoponte, and other senior USG officials met members of the U.S. travelling press and five senior members of the Australian press for cocktails and off-the-record discussions.

¶8. (U) Media Interviews: Secretary Gates participated in two one-on-one TV interviews, with Sky News Australia, (part of Rupert Murdoch's News Limited media holdings) and with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The Sky News interview, conducted by Ashleigh Gillon, focused on general questions about Iraq, Afghanistan, the F-22 Raptor, China, and Australia's withdrawal from the proposed quadrilateral strategic dialog. Mr Kerry O'Brien, host of ABC's The 7:30 Report, focused on the U.S. role in Afghanistan, asking if the U.S. was prepared to 'go it alone', in the event the conflict stretches over a number of years. Mr O'Brien also probed the issue of the statute prohibiting the sale of the

CANBERRA 00000186 003.2 OF 007

F-22 to Australia, asking if Secretary Gates was prepared to take up this issue with Congress.

¶9. (U) Press Roundtable: Secretary Gates, Ambassador McCallum and other senior USG officials met members of the U.S. travelling press and 5 senior members of the Australian press for a press roundtable. Questions from U.S. press focused on Turkey, while Australian journalists asked questions on F-22.

¶10. (U) Text of the AUSMIN 2008 Joint Communique, released on February 23, 2008, and posted to the web, follows:

Begin text:

Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations
2008 Joint Communique

Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephen Smith,
Australian Minister for Defence Joel Fitzgibbon, U.S.
Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and U.S. Deputy Secretary

SIPDIS

of State John Negroponte, met in Canberra on 23 February 2008 for Australia-United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) consultations. The discussions confirmed the two countries' strong commitment to the alliance and to working cooperatively to meet common challenges.

The Alliance

Australia and the United States reaffirmed the enduring strength of the alliance and its firm basis in shared values, high levels of trust and a record of cooperation and shared sacrifice. Both sides recalled the long history of defence cooperation, reaching back to the world wars, and given contemporary resonance by their current overseas commitments. They noted that ANZUS, strengthened by more than fifty years

of cooperation and invoked for the first time following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, continues to be the foundation of a dynamic and broad-ranging security relationship. Both sides agreed that the Australia-United States alliance will continue to make a valuable contribution to stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

The discussions reflected the global dimension of Australia-United States cooperation with both sides reiterating their commitment to working together to confront contemporary security challenges, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and global terrorism. Both sides underlined that Australia and the United States benefit from substantial convergence in their strategic and security policy priorities.

Working Together to Meet Common Challenges

Australia and the United States emphasised their commitment to a stable, united and democratic Iraq. They discussed plans for the mid-year withdrawal of Australia's battle group from southern Iraq, as well as both sides' commitment to strengthening the capacity of Iraq's government and improving conditions for the Iraqi people. Australia and the United States see the International Compact with Iraq as providing partners the best framework for contributing to Iraqi self-sufficiency. They called on the international community, including Iraq's neighbours, to assist Iraq's development as a peaceful and democratic country.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to stabilisation and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The hopes of the Afghan people for a stable, secure and prosperous future depend on the long-term solid support of the international community. To this end, the United States and Australia emphasised the importance of working with international partners and the Government of Afghanistan to develop a

CANBERRA 00000186 004.2 OF 007

comprehensive strategy to integrate more effectively security, reconstruction and development activities. They called on the international community, and in particular NATO members, to sustain and enhance contributions to Afghanistan.

The two countries agreed on the need for constructive, long-term engagement with Pakistan and discussed the results of recent democratic elections there. As a key partner for the international community's efforts in Afghanistan, both sides commended Pakistan for its efforts there and its work to combat extremism.

Australia and the United States reaffirmed their strong support for efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East, and in particular for the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority launched at the Annapolis Conference. They emphasised their strong desire to see rapid progress to implement the Roadmap and encouraged both parties to prevent day-to-day developments from undermining their shared objective of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement by the end of 2008. Both countries expressed concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and remain committed to practical measures to assist the Palestinian people.

The United States and Australia noted with concern the continued political impasse in Lebanon over the election of a new President. They reaffirmed their support for an independent and democratic Lebanon free from outside interference or violence.

Regional Cooperation

Australia and the United States reaffirmed their commitment to working closely with the countries of Southeast Asia in order to promote regional prosperity and security. They agreed to continue to build capacity in Southeast Asia in key

areas such as counter-terrorism and maritime security. Specifically, both sides agreed to assist regional countries to improve port security and to constrain the movement of terrorist finances.

Australia and the United States noted the importance of increasing, broad-based engagement with Indonesia as a democratic partner and welcomed Indonesia's growing role in regional affairs. Both countries are encouraged by Indonesia's good progress in strengthening democracy, its commitment to fighting corruption and reforming the military and its strong performance in combating terrorism. They reiterated their commitment to supporting Indonesia in these efforts, including by strengthening Indonesian security and disaster relief capabilities.

The United States and Australia agreed to continue their close collaboration with the Philippines, including strategic-level efforts such as defence reform, building capacity and military professionalism.

Both countries welcomed Thailand's return to a democratically-elected government.

Australia and the United States shared concern over developments in Burma and the lack of progress towards genuine political reform, national reconciliation, and a transition to democracy. Both sides called on the Burmese regime to cooperate with UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari in starting a legitimate dialogue with democratic and ethnic minority groups.

Australia and the United States condemned the 11 February attacks on East Timor's democratically elected leadership and expressed hope that President Ramos-Horta would make a speedy and full recovery. Both countries welcomed the response of

CANBERRA 00000186 005.2 OF 007

the Timorese Government to the crisis. The two countries reaffirmed their commitment to providing long-term support to East Timor to address its development and security challenges.

The United States and Australia agreed to consult closely on the evolution of regional fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, and to build on the successes of the 2007 APEC summit to enhance APEC's contributions to regional cooperation. The two countries pledged to continue to work closely with Japan through the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD), noting the importance of this and other fora in promoting shared interests on a range of global and regional issues.

Australia and the United States welcomed China's increased engagement in regional and global institutions, and encouraged it to continue to enhance its efforts to address contemporary challenges in a constructive manner. They encouraged China to further build regional confidence in its intentions, including by adopting a transparent approach to its military modernisation.

The United States and Australia recognised that India's stature as a democratic and prosperous country provides a unique opportunity to advance shared political, economic, and security interests in the region. The countries highlighted their wish to work effectively with India to counter terrorism, drug trafficking, and nuclear proliferation. Both countries noted the significance of the U.S.-India Civil-Nuclear Cooperation Initiative.

Australia and the United States confirmed their ongoing commitment to promoting good governance, rule of law, and economic development in the Pacific. In this regard, they noted the important role the Pacific Islands Forum plays towards stability in the region. They called upon Fiji Interim Government Prime Minister Bainimarama to adhere to his commitment to restore democratic government in Fiji by

holding elections no later than March 2009. Both countries welcomed moves by the Pacific region to enhance regional law enforcement cooperation, including on fisheries and maritime law, as reflected in the Pacific Islands Forum Vava'u Declaration and Leaders' undertaking to examine new multilateral arrangements for exchange of fisheries law enforcement data and enforcement cooperation. The United States expressed a keen interest in engaging in such discussions.

Countering Proliferation

Australia and the United States welcomed progress towards the DPRK's denuclearisation made under the Six-Party Talks process during 2007. They reiterated that a declaration of the DPRK's nuclear programs is an essential step toward the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and urged the DPRK to come forward with a complete and correct declaration as soon as possible.

Australia and the United States agreed that the illicit transfer and unauthorised access to man-portable air defence systems (MANP ADS) by terrorist and other non-state actors pose an on-going potential threat to international civil and military aviation. They agreed to continue their efforts to encourage the international community to adopt and adhere to strengthened MANP ADS counter-proliferation controls, including implementing United Nations General Assembly resolution 62/40; other multilateral and regional commitments; offers of assistance to help countries reduce the vulnerabilities of airports to MANP ADS; and involvement in U.S. stockpile security and destruction programs.

Australia and the United States reaffirmed their commitment to work in close partnership to combat the proliferation of

CANBERRA 00000186 006.2 OF 007

weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems. Both countries agreed on their shared interest in maintaining and strengthening the effectiveness of the treaty-based WMD regimes including through efforts to ensure full compliance with obligations. They reaffirmed their support for the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) as a practical means for countries to cooperate to disrupt the flow of illicit WMD materials. The United States and Australia reaffirmed their commitment to the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. They noted that they looked forward to expanding activities related to the initiative and assisting partner nations to implement the Statement of Principles. They underscored the importance of all Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) parties working for outcomes from the 2010 NPT Review Conference that reinforce this vital Treaty. They strongly support ed universal implementation of the Additional Protocol to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreements which would deliver substantial security benefits to all countries.

Australia and the United States agreed that continuing progress on nuclear arms reductions plays an important part in maintaining political support for the NPT. They reaffirmed their commitment to the nuclear disarmament goals of the NPT. They noted that as the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty had not entered into force, existing moratoriums on nuclear testing should be maintained.

The two countries remained deeply concerned by Iran's nuclear activities including its defiance of UN Security Council resolutions requiring Iran to suspend all uranium enrichment-related, reprocessing and heavy water-related activities and cooperate fully with the IAEA. They agreed to continue working together and with the international community in relevant fora to urge Iran to comply fully with its international obligations and to provide full transparency regarding its nuclear activities, especially

past military involvement in its nuclear program. Both countries underlined the UN Security Council's important responsibilities in support of a diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear issue. They noted the recent limited progress in the IAEA's efforts in Iran but affirmed that the international community is not yet able to verify that Iran's nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes, given Iran's failure to declare all of its nuclear activities, disclose fully past military involvement in its nuclear program and permit IAEA verification that it has ceased nuclear activities.

Defence Relations

Australia and the United States highlighted their interest in further deepening bilateral defence cooperation.

Both sides took note of the U.S.-Australia Treaty on Defence QBoth sides took note of the U.S.-Australia Treaty on Defence Trade Cooperation signed in September 2007 and the good progress being made in concluding its implementing arrangements. They noted that once ratified, the Treaty will ease the barriers to how the two countries share defence technologies, thereby improving interoperability of their defence forces and enhancing the two nations' security.

Australia and the United States noted the good working-level relationship between both sides' military forces and improvements in joint training and interoperability. In that context, they welcomed the forthcoming Exercise Talisman Sabre 2009. They also welcomed closer cooperation in intelligence matters, as well as the emergence of new areas of cooperative endeavour such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

CANBERRA 00000186 007.2 OF 007

Australia and the United States agreed to establish a joint investment program to develop a combined Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief capability, with both countries considering it important to enhance their ability to respond to contingencies in the region. They agreed to work on the details of the agreement over the coming year.

Both countries noted the significant benefit of working together in Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance and agreed to establish a combined team to pursue options for enhancing collaboration in the field.

Australia and the United States agreed to finalise negotiations on a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing to the continuation of the Joint Combined Training Capability, and noted the Joint Combined Training Capability's significance in reducing the cost and improving the quality of combined training.

Australia and the United States signed a Statement of Principles establishing a military satellite communications partnership. Both governments committed to taking forward the partnership in a manner which benefits the defence capabilities of the Australian Defence Forces and the U.S. military. Australia and the United States also agreed on principles for enhancing aspects of the intelligence relationship.

Next AUSMIN Meeting

The United States agreed to host the next AUSMIN meeting in 2009.

End text.

MCCALLUM